



Family Readiness Group
**HOW-TO
HANDBOOK**

Hints, suggestions, and tips for Family Readiness Groups in Hampton Roads

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to assist Family Readiness Group (FRG) leadership with information and ideas for establishing and maintaining successful groups. Family Readiness Groups (FRG) are command-sponsored organizations which operate under the provisions of OPNAVINST 1754.5.

We would like to thank the authors of *The 1993 Hampton Roads Advisory Council Idea Book*, *1996 Sparklers Handbook*, *Guidelines for Launching Clubs and Support Groups* (a Naval Services FamilyLine), and a host of Commanding Officer spouses, CMDCM/COB spouses, Family Readiness Group officers, and Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC) staff for providing information for this book.

Please help us keep this book current by providing updates and ideas. Send your input to:

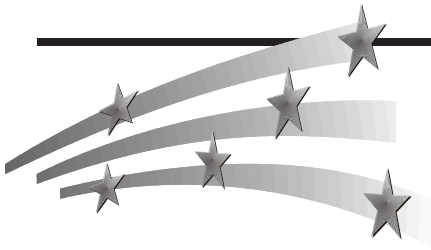
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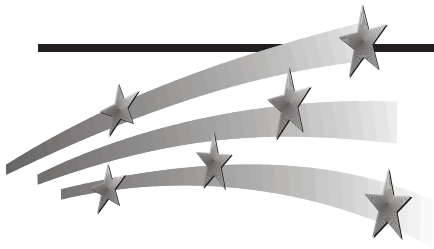
Why Have a Family Readiness Group?

Family Readiness Groups are an integral part of the military lifestyle. These groups serve the needs of individuals who share a common experience, particularly that of deployment.

When families of deployed service members know their resources, have fun, and can draw on the strength of new friends, coping skills are enhanced and deployment anxiety is lessened.

A group that is working well promotes a team effort and brings out the best of this challenging lifestyle. Lasting friendships, the satisfaction of helping others, and a sense of pride are all positive results of belonging to a strong Family Readiness Group.

However, when commands return from deployment, Family Readiness Groups may experience lower attendance or even disband. This turn of events can be disheartening for group officers and advisors, especially if the group was strong during deployment. Participants find the group that helped them with the deployment is no longer needed. Their spouses are home, and even though they may stay in contact with some members of the group, they may not have the time or desire to meet on a regular basis. Groups will typically re-energize before the next deployment cycle, and the process will start again.



Tips for Chairmen

- Set initial meeting date for committee members.
- Inform committee members of your expectations.
- Divide tasks.
- Determine a time line for completion of tasks.
- Build in a backup plan for unforeseen events.
- Regularly check in with committee members.
- Take challenges to the executive board.
- Assist in making decisions.
- Inform support group and leadership of progress.

Tips for Committee Members

- Ask yourself if you have the time to be on a committee.
- Inform the chairperson of problems.
- Keep in contact with the chairperson as needed.
- Determine event publicity.
- Determine the budget for events.
- Reserve facilities as soon as possible.
- Inform the chairperson if you are unable to fulfill your obligations.

Leadership Roles

Chairperson and Committees

Many readiness groups may not be large enough for or interested in having formal officers. Using a committee chairperson and committees is an option when organizing a small group (fewer than 15 members). The chairperson of the group hosts the meeting. The group, as a whole, plans and decides what interests they would like to pursue. Committees can then be formed to research interests from holiday parties to the Homecoming celebration. A popular structure is to have a committee chairperson-at-large with several committee chairmen under them. Participants in the group can join any committee in which they have an interest.

Serving on a committee is important, and accepting a committee chairmanship is a challenging commitment. Many people will depend on you to get the job done. Working on a major project is fun and rewarding, especially when you see the results of your efforts. Your sense of humor will be your greatest asset—use it often! Successful chairmen and committee members have these traits in common: dependability, the ability to problem solve, meet deadlines, communicate effectively, and work for the benefit of the group.

Role of Family Readiness Group Officers

Larger, more formalized groups generally elect officers to lead their Family Readiness Group. These officers often assume their new roles with little or no experience or guidance.

Each role can be established for optimum effectiveness in a variety of ways. These roles can be stated in your bylaws/procedures manual. Following are some general guidelines and ideas on how each role might look.

Turnover or passdown information for each role should be given to incoming officers/chairmen. Be sure to include all financial transactions and general information about the group that will help with the leadership transition.

Advisor

An advisor is an important part of any Family Readiness Group, large or small. An advisor makes recommendations, consults, and provides information. An advisor is typically the spouse of the Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, Command Master Chief or Chief of the Boat, or another representative by command appointment. The role of the advisor depends on the interest level of the individual spouse.

Duties: Duties are defined by the individual. They can include but are not limited to:

- **Mediator:** Assist in reconciling disputes.
- **Cheerleader:** Provide encouragement.
- **Liaison:** Provide command information, when appropriate, and knowledge of how FRGs work.
- **Resource:** Share knowledge.
- **Coach:** Tutor from the sidelines

Ombudsman

Readiness group board members and ombudsmen are equally important in stature but have separate and distinct responsibilities. The ombudsman is a spouse of a service member with the command who



is appointed by the Commanding Officer to provide information and referrals for local military and civilian resources to family members. The readiness group is a social organization. Ombudsmen are part of the Family Readiness Group structure; although they may not have a role as an officer of the group, they should be encouraged to participate on committees and get to know as many of the command spouses as possible.

Duties:

- Provide assistance with starting an FRG
- Provide information resources and referrals.
- Communicate command information.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Provide encouragement to and inspire camaraderie among command families.

(See Ombudsman Manual for further information)

Tips for Advisors

- Read minutes and current bylaws/procedures of the group to become familiar with their history.
- Make the effort to get to know group officers.
- Share your experiences with the group (good experiences as well as challenging experiences).
- Attend as many meetings as possible. At least one advisor should attend every meeting.
- Acknowledge your support of group leadership through name tags, certificates, and recognition from the command.
- Let command family members know your level of interest. How involved would you like to be with the group?

Tips for Ombudsmen

- Work as closely as possible with your FRG officers.
- Participate in group activities.
- Keep informed of current information.
- Get to know as many command spouses as possible.
- Remember, you are all striving for the same goal—command support!
- Attend FRG meetings consistently.
- Communicate effectively and maintain open business relationship.

Tips for Presidents

- Be prepared for your meetings.
- Begin and end meetings on time.
- Be diplomatic.
- Be flexible.
- Be a good listener.
- Be courteous.
- Be willing to delegate effectively.



President

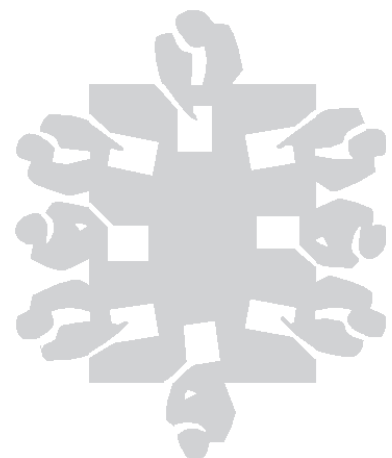
The president represents the command at all times—to the spouses and to anyone he or she may come in contact with while in the role of president.

Duties:

- Know your current bylaws/procedures.
- Have a prepared agenda for the meeting.
- Start and end your meeting on time. You also need to think about:
 - Opening the building/room
 - Arranging the room
 - Cleaning up
 - Locking up.
- Sign official correspondence.
- Appoint committee chairmen and maintain a list of committees.
- Establish a working relationship with your advisors/sponsors.
- Recognize committee volunteers.
- Delegate responsibility evenly throughout your group or among committee members.
- For more formal meetings, be familiar with basic parliamentary law and procedure (Robert's Rules of Order).

SAMPLE AGENDA

- Call the meeting to order.
- Welcome participants.
- Introduce new members/participants to the group.
- Introduce guests or guest speaker.
- Ask for the secretary's minutes and ask for corrections or additions. If none, say, "Minutes stand approved as read."
- Ask for the treasurer's report.
- Ask for committee reports.
- Review unfinished business.
- Ask for new business.
- Ask for announcements.
- Adjourn business and socialize.



Vice President

The vice president's job is probably the least defined. The vice president traditionally performs the duties of the president in his or her absence. Many groups have the vice president lead the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and act as the group's program coordinator. Some also act as greeters at each meeting.

Duties:

- Chair the meeting in the president's absence.
- Secure guest speakers.
- Know your bylaws/procedures.
- Lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Coordinate publicity.
- Perform other duties as assigned in your bylaws/procedures manual.
- Be a neutral party to help dissolve gossip groups or clicks.

Program Coordinator

The program coordinator, often the vice president, is responsible for asking a guest speaker to address your group. Here are seven steps to guide the program coordinator's activities:

1. **Learn:** What topics are the participants interested in? Are there specific needs to be addressed?
2. **Find:** Who can provide the information?
3. **Secure:** Call the agency to secure a speaker. See FFSC for further guidance or ideas for topics.
4. **Remind:** Verify the date, time, and place of your meeting for the speaker.
5. **Greet:** Greet your speaker at the door.
6. **Introduce:** Introduce your speaker to the officers of your group.
7. **Thank:** Thank your speaker for attending your meeting and send a thank you note within a week after the program. People are more likely to come back if formally thanked!

Tips for Vice Presidents

- Communicate with your president in order to be aware of all aspects of your group's activities.
- Check local papers, resources, and Ombudsmen for ideas on speakers for your group.

Tips for Securing a Speaker

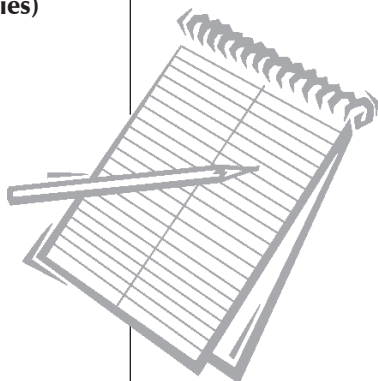
Successful programs for Family Support Groups tend to be relatively short (30–45 minutes). Interactive programs are best! The program/presentation should be educational, informative, and fun! It is not necessary to have a speaker at each meeting—people need time to enjoy each other's company. Develop a six-month or annual plan for inviting speakers to come to your group and vary the topic areas.

Tips for Program Coordinators

- Provide your name and number to the speaker.
- Will your meeting facility support video or overhead equipment or microphones?
- As a courtesy, schedule your speaker's presentation prior to conducting your business meeting.
- Send a thank you note to the speaker.

Tips for Secretaries

- Write the minutes as soon as possible after each meeting.
- Note the date on all committee reports and minutes.
- Note the process of organizing events such as parties, bake sales, etc. The process should include methods of organizing events, contacts, committee structure, and lessons learned. Having this report to refer to will save time in the future if you choose to repeat the event.
- Hand write thank-you notes, personal invitations, and condolence cards.
- Type formal or business correspondence.
- Confirm spelling, title, rank, and the appropriate mailing address for civilian or military guests.
- Proofread correspondence for content, grammar, and spelling. It is better if someone else proofreads as well.
- Keep a box, binder, or folder of official group business information. The following information should be available to incoming advisors and officers:
 - Minutes
 - Committee reports
 - Correspondence (copies)
 - Bylaws/procedures
 - Attendance records.



Secretary

The secretary is responsible for taking minutes at the meeting. Minutes are written records of your group's meetings and contain what was accomplished, not what was said, by participants. It is a record of where the group has been and where it is going. Minutes also provide information about the last meeting for those who were not able to attend.

Typical Duties:

- Write minutes of the meetings.
- Read the minutes from the previous meeting at the next meeting (optional).
- Keep attendance records of participants (optional).
- Compose correspondence.
- Maintain file of incoming and outgoing correspondence.

SAMPLE MINUTES (Formal)

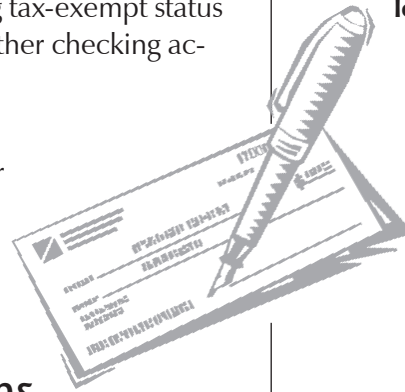
- Name of the organization.
- Date, hour, and location of the meeting.
- Attendance and who presided over the meeting.
- Guest speaker and topic.
- State each main motion and the name of the person making it.
- State whether the motion was passed or not passed and record the vote on the question.
- State whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved as read or corrected.
- List committee reports and who read them.
- Record old and new business agenda items discussed.

Treasurer

The treasurer is the person who manages the group's financial endeavors. Treasurers need to be trustworthy, good with money, and have excellent bookkeeping skills.

Duties:

- Maintain records of all funds.
- Provide a statement of finances as often as required.
- Provide complete financial report after an audit.
- Reconcile bank statements every month.
- Submit receipts within 30 days of purchase.
- Deposit money within seven days of receipt.
- Check with command for information regarding tax-exempt status and setting up a checking account. Seek out further checking account information from your local credit union.
- Don't hand out blank checks.
- Audit accounts at least annually by command or other designated person by the CO.
- Require two signatures on checks to maintain "checks and balances."



Tips for Treasurers

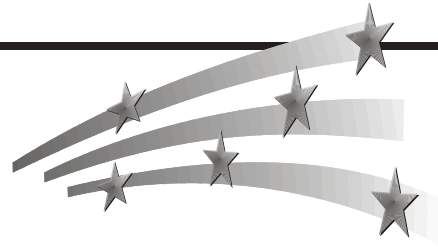
- Purchase and maintain a ledger.
- Keep a file of receipts, ledger, and account information.
- Keep a box for cash, donations, dues, etc.
- Keep accurate records.
- Keep all receipts and log all check and cash transactions.
- Ensure all transactions in the ledger match receipts and check amounts.

Standing Committees or Functions

These may include, but are not limited to, the following suggested committees and functions:

- **Welcome Committee** is a committee comprised of volunteers (not necessarily officers) who agree to welcome new members to FRG meetings, make hospital visits, and visit a new mom or new members at home. Members may put together and hand out "goodie bags" of appropriate small items for the occasion. Members may also send out birthday, get well, or other greeting cards.
- **Communications or Publicity Committee** is comprised of one or more volunteers who prepare meeting announcements, news items, and articles for publication in the ombudsman or command newsletter, be "web master" for the FRG web page, and otherwise handle communications and publicity for the group.
- **Special Events Committee** will assist the Program Coordinator in planning special activities and events for the group that may include holiday parties, homecoming events, group picnics, and similar events.
- **Fundraising Committee** will plan and arrange for fundraisers for the group, researching the applicable local regulations, obtaining necessary permissions, and arranging and managing logistics for the event.

Membership and Participation



Participation in your group is based upon several factors, including stateside or overseas location, and whether the command is deployed or in port. Typically, participation will grow as commands get ready to deploy and decline after the deployment. Why? Because of the perception that “support of the group” is no longer needed when the command returns from deployments. Keeping the basic structure of the group is an important factor when it starts to become active again. Develop an annual or strategic plan and work with the command to keep activities varied; it may help membership grow and/or stabilize. A sample strategic plan is located in Appendix E.

Group numbers may be low. Many spouses work and/or volunteer, and some may not choose to participate in the Family Readiness Group. It is not the numbers that are important. It is the sense of command support, camaraderie, and friendship that makes even a small group successful.

IDEAS for Participation and Membership

☐ Publicize your group and events as widely as possible. A notice in base newspapers, the command careline, emailing, and personal phone calls are successful tools. Two to four weeks notice prior to an event gives participants plenty of time to plan. A sample phone tree is located in Appendix B.

☐ Use the command newsletter(s) to promote your group, its purpose, accomplishments, and scheduled activities. Remember to include the meeting time, place, and phone number for a point of contact. A “how to” for newsletters is located in Appendix C.

☐ Send a welcome letter to new spouses through command Welcome Aboard packets. A

letter given to service members at their ship indoctrination is another way to let them know about your group and what activities are planned.

☐ Assign someone to greet new members and make them feel welcome and comfortable at meetings. This can be done on a rotating basis. This is one of the most important aspects of success for your group. Spouses may not return to another meeting if they feel unwelcome or ignored!

☐ Use a questionnaire to gather ideas for activities that would interest group members. If the activities are fun, varied, and cost effective, you will please most of the people most of the time.

☐ Keep participants actively involved in the group by inviting them to participate on various committees. Be careful not to pressure people into a committee role. You want volunteers who are interested in the job, not people who think they are doing the group a favor! A person who has been “volunteered” may not be effective if they are uninterested or lack the skills to fit the position or task. If participants feel a sense of belonging and contributing to the group, they will take ownership of their commitments and ensure a productive organization.

☐ Show shipboard videotapes at your meetings. Encourage spouses to attend and see their service member.

☐ Sponsor a “Bring a Friend” night and give away prizes.

☐ Sponsor a Captain’s Call or a CMDCM/COB’s Call to give spouses the opportunity to talk to the Captain, or Command Master Chief or Chief of the Boat.

☐ Ride share. Some spouses may not be familiar with the area. Offer a ride to those who may not come to a meeting because they are not sure of the location of the meeting or event.

☐ Offer interesting topics for discussion. Having speakers at your meetings to discuss a wide variety of topics is fun and can be a draw for your meeting. Typical topics of interest are deployment, parenting, and financial planning.

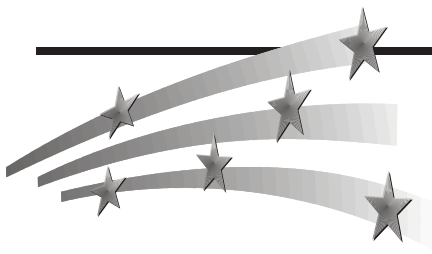
☐ Offer variety in your meetings. Alternating business, craft, potluck, and outside social events will satisfy the wide range of interests of your group.

☐ Consider meeting every other month or quarterly when the command is in port.

☐ Provide child care whenever possible.

☐ During deployments ask local Child Development Center for assistance with child care during FRG meetings.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS



Fund-raising

Family Readiness Groups are self-sustaining and, from time to time, need to raise money to support their activities. Fund-raisers must be approved by the command. When you raise money, remember to keep it simple! Large, involved projects are time-consuming and take an enormous commitment. Committee members must be dedicated and give full attention to the project at hand. The majority of the money raised should be used to fund projects and plans within a six-month or one-year time frame to benefit the spouses who have contributed their time, effort, and money before they leave the command. If ever in doubt, always refer back to your command POC and OPNAVINST 1754.5 Encl (6).

Tell the group members the reason for a fund-raiser. For example, the money will be used to cost-share the price of tickets to local attractions or to help pay for Halfway Celebration activities.

Marketing is another important factor. Groups are sometimes limited by where they can sell their items. Make sure there is a market for what you make or develop. For example, cookbooks are fun to put together; however if the command is small, you may not be able to sell all the cookbooks you have ordered. Do the homework! What the cost will be, who will buy it, and where it will be sold are important decisions that need to be made before you go ahead with any money-making activity.

IDEAS for Fundraising

☐ “Make It, Bake It, Grow It” Sale

Have a “Make It, Bake It, Grow It” sale at a meeting. Each person brings an item from one of those categories, and everyone bids on them.



☐ Tee-shirts

Designing a tee-shirt is a good outlet for creativity. Don't duplicate or sell tee-shirts that are sold in the ship's store! FRG's can not be in competition with the command's store. Watch copyright laws!

☐ Bake Sale

Have a bake sale at your meeting, at the command, on base, or in the community. Ask for donations instead of pricing items. You'll reap a larger profit!

☐ Door Prizes

A simple item is wrapped, and participants pay 50 cents or \$1 for a ticket. Have the drawing at the end of the meeting.

☐ Theme Baskets

Decorate a basket with a specific theme—holidays, romance, cooking, and kids are popular choices. Have a drawing for the basket.

☐ **First Kiss Drawing**

It's simple and fun. At each meeting or function, participants who are interested may donate money for a raffle ticket. At the last meeting before Homecoming, a ticket is drawn. The person who wins is able to be the first in line to get that "First Kiss." Keep in mind that the person who wins the "First Kiss" gets that opportunity after the official party has boarded the ship.

☐ **Additional Ideas:**

- Sub/pizza sale on board (get command permission)
- Keychains
- Mouse pads
- Silent auctions
- Holiday ornaments
- Throw blankets
- Lunch bags (sandwich, chips, and soda sold on board with command permission)
- T-shirts
- Sweatshirts
- Drinking cups/glasses/tumblers

Remember:

Get permission and guidance from your commanding officer for all fund-raising ideas. There are legal constraints for fund-raising activities.

Effective Meetings

Meetings can be informal by using chairmen or formal by using officers. The choice usually depends on command leadership preference and the size of the group. If the group is small, under 15 participants, having chairmen and using committees makes sense. The group will not appear to be "leadership heavy."

Bylaws/procedures should reflect the simplest way of running a business meeting to keep order and to have a process of decision making. Keeping bylaws uncomplicated with limited rules and regulations will help the group run most efficiently. An example of bylaws/procedures is included in Appendix A. A more formal example of bylaws is located in *Guidelines for Launching Clubs and Command Family Associations* provided by Naval Services FamilyLine Association.

☐ Have an agenda for all meetings, both formal and informal. Post it or distribute it to membership.

☐ Start meetings on time to discourage latecomers. If meetings *always* start on time, participants are less likely to be late.

☐ It is easier to set dates and times if everyone is encouraged to bring a calendar to the meetings. Design calendars for participants.

☐ Set a time limit on agenda items to be discussed. An agenda item that is discussed over and over is frustrating to your group.

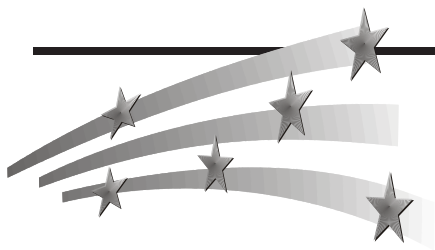
☐ If many ideas will be discussed, assign a committee to take the ideas for action and research. Have them report back at a future meeting.

☐ Establish a convenient voting method. One simple method of voting is to allow only those in attendance at the meeting to vote. Groups can sometimes get bogged down in a complicated voting procedure that inhibits the group, and the voting procedure itself can become an issue.

If voting on an important issue will cause the group to split, ask the group to compromise by attempting to reach a consensus or to agree to do more research. No one wins when half of the group is unhappy with an important issue.

Remember to get permission from the command and talk to the advisors if decisions are controversial and warrant command attention.





Icebreakers

The saying goes, “It’s a small world.” The purpose of icebreakers is to give people an opportunity to get to know each other and find out what they have in common. Even if participants do know each other, it is still a great way to start meetings. It is an upbeat way for participants to relax and get to know all of the people in the room, not just their close friends.

Questions for Participants

Have participants take turns going around the room, giving their names and asking questions like:

- What is your home state?
- How many children do you have?
- What is your favorite vegetable?
- What is your zip code?
- Where did you meet your spouse?

Questions should be general in nature and not too personal.

Name Tent or Name Tag Activity

Fold sheets of construction paper into thirds, forming long tents. Have participants write their names on the front of the tents and draw their hobbies on the reverse side. Participants then walk around the room to introduce themselves and guess each other’s hobbies. There are probably other people in the room with similar interests. Another option is to use name tags. Have participants put their names and hobbies on the front of a name tag.

Who am I?

Pin the name of a famous person on the back of each group member. Have everyone ask questions requiring “yes” or “no” answers of one another

for a preset amount of time. At the end of the time limit, go around the room, starting with yourself, and have everyone guess who they are. Keep the game

as simple as possible by using themes—couples, famous athletes, and other recognizable celebrities.

Don’t Say “I”

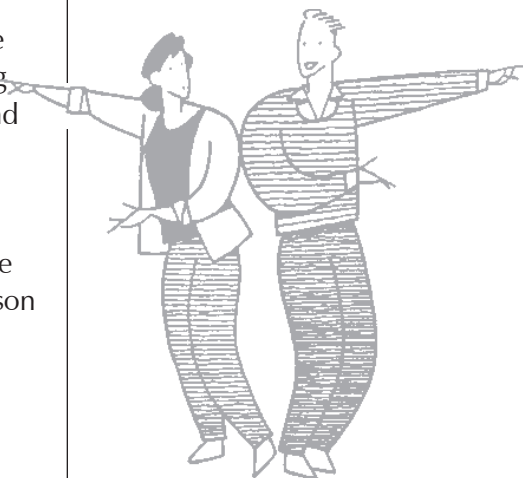
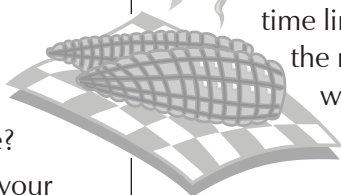
Give each person three pennies. Ask participants to move around the room, introducing themselves to one another and asking questions that might prompt a person to say “I.” If anyone does, the participant collects a penny from the person who said “I.” The person with the most pennies at the end of the preset amount of time wins a small door prize.

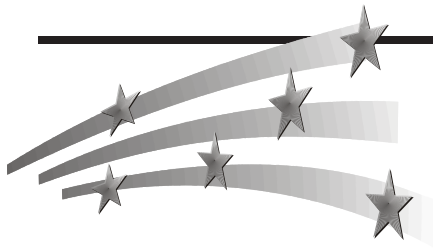
No Hands Directions

Divide the group into small groups of two or three. Ask participants to sit on their hands facing each other and then give directions to their house or directions from their house to the closest mall. It’s amazing how some people can’t remember street names or indicate left or right turns without using their hands.

M&M Game

Pass around a bag of M&Ms and tell everyone to take some. After they have taken some say, “OK, now you have to tell us something about yourself for each M&M.”





Family Support Group Activities

Building a unified support group is a must for good teamwork later down the road. Joint activities are one way to build teamwork. Choose any of the ideas presented in this chapter that fit your group size, activity level, and interest. An event planner for elaborate functions is located in Appendix D.

IDEAS for Activities

☐ **Invite guest speakers to your group**

☐ **Learn a craft or a new recipe**

☐ **Meet socially at the movies, for coffee, or at the gym**

☐ **Attend command picnics and parties**

☐ **Make a calendar for the year using an annual plan**

☐ **Dinner Out**

Dine out and follow up with a play, movie, or sporting event.



☐ **Go Bowling**

Go for one night or form a team on a league.

☐ **Be a tourist and see the local sights!**

☐ **Auto Maintenance**

Learn simple car maintenance tips from the base hobby shop or other trained mechanics.

☐ **House/Home Maintenance**

Find handy maintenance tips to share at meetings.

☐ **Come As You Are**

Call everyone over for an impromptu get-together.

☐ **Have a fun evening with good food!**

☐ **Hold an Auction**

Everyone brings a White Elephant (a usable, inexpensive item). Participants "bid" on items by placing a dime in a basket that circulates around the room. Set a timer for a random amount of time, and when it goes off, the last person to put a dime in the basket gets the item.

☐ **Learn a Craft**

Have members of your club share their craft with the rest of the group.

☐ **Security Night**

Have a police officer talk about car, home, and personal safety.

☐ **Shared Albums**

Share your life with the group—each member tells a story about his or her life.

☐ **Learn**

MWR and some community centers may offer classes in golf, sailing, and scuba diving—the list is endless. Home improvement stores have classes on techniques from wallpapering to repairing drywall. Take a class as a group or with a few people—it can be lots of fun!

☐ **Rent Movies**

Pop popcorn and sit on the floor. Have each member bring a favorite movie.

☐ **Play Cards and Games**

Pinochle, Spades, and Monopoly are favorites.

☐ **My Favorite Recipe**

A twist to the standard potluck dinner.

☐ **Build-a-Sub Night**

Each person brings an ingredient to share.

☐ **New Recipe Night**

This is the time for everyone to try out those great-sounding recipes they've been reluctant to fix because they didn't want to eat it for a week! Everyone prepares a *new* recipe for the meal.

☐ **Salad Night**

Guests bring prepared items for a salad.

☐ **Wok Works**

Each person brings an ingredient that is pre-sliced and ready to add to the stir-fry.

☐ **Garden or Plant Exchange**

Everyone brings a plant or cutting to exchange.

☐ **Whose Hand is This?**

Send a Polaroid photograph of each spouse's hand to the command. Each service member selects his/her spouse's. This can be

done command-wide. For large commands, be sure to divide pictures into divisions before sending to the command, so that they don't have to track everyone down.

☐ **Spouse Jigsaw Puzzles**

Take a picture of each spouse and cut it into a jigsaw puzzle (or have it made professionally). This can also be a group picture for everyone to work on together.

☐ **Care Packages**

Have each spouse bake a dozen cookies or other sweets and send them to the command to be shared by all. Single sailors will enjoy the gesture as well.

☐ **Collage**

Gather pictures from the families of as many crew members as possible. Organize them into a collage for display in a prominent place with the deployed command for all to enjoy.

☐ **Videotape a Support Group Function**

Set some of the highlights to music and send the videotape to the command.

☐ **Decorative Pillowcases**

Have computer-image photographs of spouses imprinted on pillowcases or decorate the pillowcases using permanent markers or inks.

☐ **Handprint Hankies**

Have the children draw pictures or put their handprints on handkerchiefs. Sew them together and send for display on the mess decks.

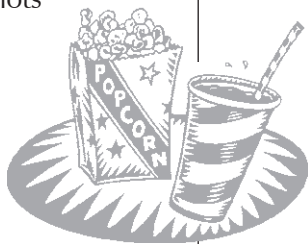
☐ **Healthy Outings**

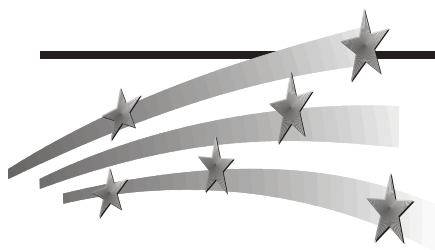
Hiking, biking, walking, and other outside activities are a great way to keep busy and be healthy and active. A group of friends makes it more fun.

☐ **Calendar Days**

Create a calendar page for each separate month with messages on special dates for deployed member and mail to deployed command.

This is just a short list to get you started. With a little imagination from you and your group, the list will grow.





IDEAS for Children

Children's Activities

Having parties and social events for children can be a great way to bring military children together for friendship and a sense of belonging.

☐ **Children's Sunday Sundae Parties**

Have each family bring their favorite toppings. Let the club furnish the ice cream, if funds allow. Creativity soars, as there is "something about ice cream...."

☐ **Picnic in the Park**

Have parent/child potato sack and three-legged races. Each family brings a salad to share, something to grill, and drinks for themselves.

☐ **Meet at the Beach**

Having many adults makes watching the children at the beach a little easier.

☐ **Meet at the Pool**

Use on-base pools. Bring the kids or have a parent's day out.

☐ **Craft Day**

Make a simple craft with the children. One idea is laminated place mats, for holiday or everyday use. There are probably talented people in your group, and there are many craft books available in the library.

☐ **Costume Party**

Don't reserve this idea just for Halloween!

☐ **Garlands**

Have the kids decorate their own holiday or everyday construction paper garland. Hook the links together to form a garland to decorate the mess decks, wardroom, ready room, or work space.

☐ **Wands and Crowns**

Children can make wands out of cardboard boxes, aluminum foil, straws, and ribbons. Crowns can be made out of construction paper.

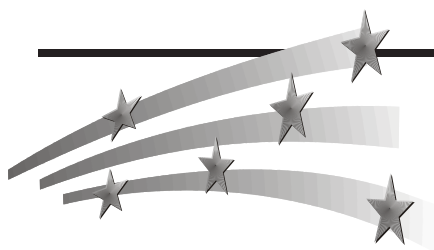
☐ **Children's American Flag**

Create a large flag where each red stripe is made of red handprints from children (add their name at the bottom of their print) and in the middle of each white star tape a small headshot of each child.

☐ **Life Size Hug**

Trace the outline of the child from the waist up, have the child color it in, and mail off to the deployed parent. When the parent feels lonely they can pull out the hug from their child.





Holiday Parties for Children

Holidays are a special time for families, but especially for children. There are many books on planning children's parties available in stores and at the library or on the internet. When you plan the parties, remember that a little activity goes a long way! Children are often overwhelmed with too much stimulation and are often content simply being with other children. Some ideas may include:

IDEAS for Parties

☐ **Make valentines**

☐ **Celebrate the Fourth of July**

☐ **Spring Fling**

Bring in the spring season with a Spring Fling! Divide the children into groups and rotate them through the games. This creates a more organized atmosphere.

- A piece of felt (relating to the holiday theme) stapled to a sheet of plywood makes a great target for ping-pong balls with Velcro loop glued on. The eyes, nose, and mouth are prize-winning target areas.
- Sponsor an egg hunt with treats inside the plastic eggs.
- Offer face painting.
- Have a picnic or BBQ.

- Cordon off a corner for story time.

- Have a bunny hop race.
- Have a craft table for children to color, stamp, paint, make hats, or stickers.

☐ **Fall Harvest**

Celebrate the fall season with a number of events for children:

- Hay rides from local VFW groups or other community volunteers.
- Have your own large plastic bucket to bob for apples and a prize for the winner.
- Have a costume party.
- Do your own beanbag toss.
- Goodie bags stuffed with \$1.00 items.

☐ **Trick or Treat at the Mall**

Less mess, less organization. For smaller groups this may sound too easy to be true, but it is fun. Select a meeting place and time in advance.



December Holiday Party: Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwaanza

This is by far the most involved, yet most appreciated of all parties. Be sure to start early in the year—September is not too early. First on the agenda is finding a location, because they go fast. Reserve your location and Santa suit rentals as far in advance as possible. Check with local

toy wholesalers for novelty prizes. Order early and in sufficient quantities. It is better to overestimate and save leftovers for the future than to run short. Some ideas for holiday parties are:



☐ Gift from Santa

Have parents bring a wrapped gift for each of their children. Be sure each gift is labeled with a name or sex and age. Set a dollar limit (ex.\$20.00) for gifts.

☐ Tickets to a Show

Take the children to see the local ballet's production of *The Nutcracker Suite* or other holiday programs. Group discounts may be available.

☐ Make Holiday Ornaments

A good no-bake dough recipe is:

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup salt
- 2 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp. oil
- ½ tsp. food coloring



- Combine flour, salt, and cream of tartar.
- Gradually stir in water, oil, and food coloring.
- Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until a ball forms.
- Remove from heat and knead until smooth.
- Store dough in airtight containers until ready for use.
- After ornaments are made, allow to air dry overnight.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS



Halfway Celebrations

Halfway Celebration is a symbol of having made it through the first half of the deployment, and it is a time to reenergize those skills developed in the first half of deployment to get through the second half. Start planning for Halfway Celebration and Homecoming early in the deployment.

If the group wishes to have a theme for the deployment, determine what it will be at your first or second meeting. A group may meet formally only five more times before the end of the deployment. Some successful themes include: "Follow the Yellow Brick Road," "Right Here Waiting for You," "Back in the U.S.A.," or anything that might represent the group, such as the time of year, a popular song, or a movie. Maintain the theme throughout all the deployment projects.

Planning a successful Halfway Celebration is much like planning any party. Form a committee to do the research and legwork for the group.

What?

Observe Halfway Celebration any way the group sees appropriate. Potluck dinners, dinners out, or having parties at base clubs, hotel ballrooms, and restaurants are popular choices.

Where?

Good places to suggest are local hotels or clubs (for catered affairs), dinner theaters, or restaurants (for simple "meals only" affairs). Consider on-base facilities that may charge a nominal fee.

When?

There is no "exact" halfway point, so choose a date somewhere in the range and go with it.

Who?

Again, it's up to your group. Some include mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. Most include only the spouse or significant other of the deployed service member.

Cost

Finding places to have your Halfway Celebration can be challenging and fun. You will want a location that appeals to the majority of the group. Offer a variety of activities or places to go. Some places may be out of reach financially for some members of your group, so sensitivity to this fact is important. One option would be to subsidize the cost through fund-raising activities, so all can participate. Contact another command FRG to see what they did for an event.

Advertise

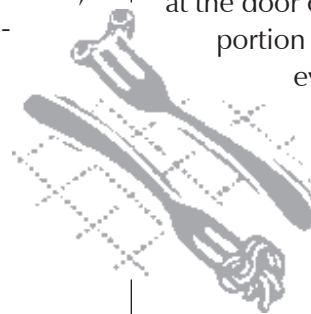
Get the word out early to everyone invited, so that they have time to save (especially for large affairs). Make sure everyone knows the details as far in advance as possible.

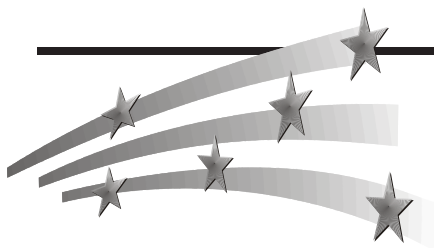
Reservations

Be sure to allow plenty of time between the RSVP and the date of the affair. At least two weeks is a must. To cut down on no-shows, charge a small registration fee that can be refunded at the door or used to cover a portion of the cost of the evening.

If the plan is to have the party at a popular restaurant or night club, be sure to make reservations two months in advance and ask about their policy on reservations and cancellations. Calling too late means the room or date that you have promised to your group may not be available.

Safety is always a concern for spouses. When making plans, take into consideration the location, parking, outside lighting, and other safety factors. Car pooling can add fun to the event.





Homecoming

The best homecoming day is a planned one! Planning for Homecoming is a big job and should begin the minute the command deploys. Family Readiness Groups spend most of their money, time, and effort for that special day. A Homecoming committee should be established at the first or second meeting. This will allow enough time for the group to decide on activities, banners, music, etc. The most important sight for service members is their families standing on the pier to welcome them home!

Final Fling

Final Fling occurs about ten days before Homecoming and is a significant event onboard the ship. Homecoming at last! Family Readiness Groups should choose to celebrate this as well. Going out to dinner or having a potluck is a good way to celebrate the ship coming home. This may be an option for Family Readiness Groups who choose not to do a reception the night before the command returns.

Night Before Party

Many Family Readiness Groups choose to have a reception the night before Homecoming. The reception is for all Family Readiness Group members and out-of-town guests. It allows crew families to meet each other the night before and share the excitement of the command's return from sea. It's also a good time to talk to everyone — especially extended family members — about safety on the pier and ship or release other important information to help them have a great homecoming day.



☐ **Flags and Buttons**

Sell or give away American flags or command buttons to have on the pier or in the hangar.

☐ **USO**

Check your local USO to see what type of assistance they can provide on your homecoming day. Some may hand out drinks or food.

☐ **Music**

Use bands, DJs, or tape recordings. The host command will coordinate securing a Navy band, if one is available. If a band is unavailable, ask the point of contact to check into obtaining a local high school band. The host command may be able to set up a sound system for prerecorded music which you provide or military music which they provide.

❑ Leis

There are many different ways to make bow leis. The simplest and least expensive ones are made from plastic bags. Red, white, and blue bags can be ordered locally from businesses advertising in the Yellow Pages under plastic, sheeting, or business supplies. The host command can help you decide on the length you need, and the plastics distributor can help you order the quantity of bags you need.

- Cut the bags into strips 18 inches wide by 36 inches long. Fold the strips in half to make an 18-inch square and tie around a ½-inch clothesline cut to a length of approximately 100 feet. The lei will look lifeless and limp at first, but it can be puffed up by gently separating the layers of plastic.
- Leis are fun to construct. Have a picnic or potluck and make a day of it. Unlike painting projects, children enjoy making the lei, since it is difficult for them to make a mistake.
- Set up a time with the host command to get the lei to your command via a tug boat. Identify volunteers to get the lei from storage to the host command.

❑ Other Options and Tips for Making Your Lei:

- Use white trash bags and spray paint colors of your choosing.
- Instead of trash bags use plastic tablecloths.
- Cut trash bags or tablecloths into strips .
- Use a rope instead of clothesline.
- Borrow or rent a lei from a sister ship.
- If you plan on mailing to the ship instead of working with host command, mail at least 30 days prior to return date.
- Depending on your size ship, leis may be 75 to 175 feet long.
- Be sure to leave ample space at each end of the lei for it to be properly hung.

ADDITIONAL
IDEAS
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❑ Welcome Home Banner

Ask local awning and tent companies or boat yards for a donation of canvas. Latex enamel paints are best because the colors are varied, and they don't run like oil base paints. The cost is minimal, and clean up is easier.

- Before picking up a paintbrush, design the banner entirely on graph paper. To ease transfer of the design, graph the entire face of the canvas in one- or two-inch squares and copy the design from the paper.
- When satisfied with the design, find a large area to paint in, such as a basement, empty parking lot, or driveway. If inside, ensure the space is well ventilated. If outside, be sure to anchor the corners and edges of the canvas to avoid wind damage. Start painting in the center of the sign and work out to the edges so there is plenty of work space for everyone.
- After suitable drying time (usually two days in sunny, 70-degree weather), attach grommets at 18-inch intervals on all four sides. Do not attempt to fold the sign until you are absolutely sure it is dry. Cut slits at regular intervals to allow wind to pass through while hanging.

❑ “Burma Shave” Signs

These are signs with a progressive message. Some are elaborate cutouts in the shape of the command mascot; some are as simple as words on squares. These 1/4-inch plywood signs nailed to 2- by 2-inch wooden posts will last through many homecomings. Once again, latex exterior enamel paints are a good choice. Some rules to remember are:

- Use short phrases or one or two words per sign, so reading is easier to the passerby.
- Space signs at least three feet, but no more than five feet apart at the most used exit from the base.
- Be sure to remove signs one week after homecoming.

❑ Picket Signs

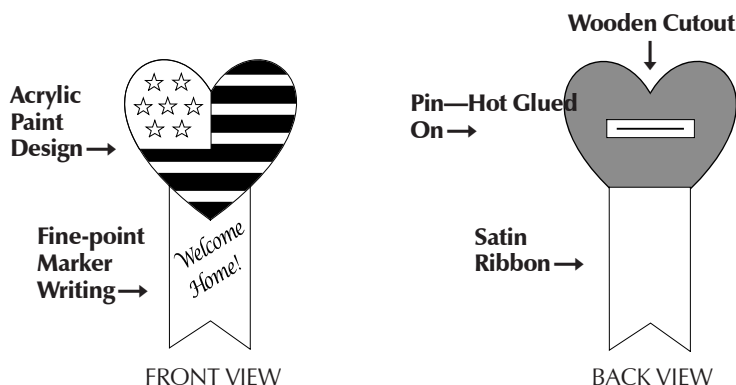
Staple sheets of poster board to 1- by 12-inch wood slats for handles. This is a good activity for groups. Either decorate alike or personalize.

❑ Pennants

Cut felt or cloth into long triangles. Hem the straight edges to allow 1/4-inch dowels in the hems. If time or ability is taxed with hemming, simply hot glue the straight edge of the cloth to the dowel. Pennants can be personalized or standardized for distribution on the pier or in the hangar. Designs can be added with craft paints, letter cutouts, or markers.

❑ Logos

Have a logo design contest. Try to limit colors and design graphics, since prices rise quickly when many colors or intricate designs are used. Handmade pins of the logo can add a personal touch to Homecoming.



☐ **Pillowcase Banner**

Start this project as soon as the command leaves for deployment. Each family cuts open a pillowcase and draws a cute saying or love note on it. Sew the pillowcases together and mail off to ship. Display on the mess decks or other prominent location. Crew members can cut their pillowcases off or invite family members onboard to a duty night dinner for the occasion.

☐ **Banners**

Banners on sheets, canvas, poster board, or butcher paper can be decorated with paints and markers. Use your imagination! Check with the host command for details on placement.

☐ **New Parents**

Be sure to have a special area sectioned off for the new additions to the command's family. Generally, new parents are permitted off the ship first.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

..... **IMPORTANT**

- If DJs or radio stations are asked to come aboard the military installation, they must have permission from PAO (Public Affairs Officer.) Coordinate this with the host command's point of contact.
 - Vendors are not permitted to sell their wares on the pier, tarmac, or aircraft hangars.
 - Have a backup plan in case it rains or the command comes in a day early or late.
 - Too many activities may cause children to be overwhelmed.
 - Is the ship bringing back tigers? Tigers are children, siblings, and parents of service members. No spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends are permitted on Tiger Cruises.
 - Advise out-of-town guests on pier safety. There are holes, hoses, valves, and other hazards that could cause someone to fall. Grease and oil could stain clothing. High heels are not advisable on board ships, since they lead to slips and falls on ladders or the brow.
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Bylaws/Procedures

Refer to OPNAVINST 1754.5, Enclosure 4, Page (1-4).

Here is a very abbreviated sample of bylaws or procedures for the Family Readiness Group. Use OPNAVINST 1754.5 (Enclosure 4) for complete guidance for Family Readiness Group Bylaws.

Name of the group

USS ALWAYS GREY (DDG 000)

Purpose

We meet to support the families and crew members of *USS ALWAYS GREY* by providing support and friendship to all command families and service members.

Membership

Command families and friends are invited to attend meetings.

Procedures

1. Committee chairperson-at-large with other committees as necessary.
 - a. Term of commitment will be one year.
 - b. The group has an option to elect a formal slate of officers when necessary.
2. Chairmen/Officers will:
 - a. Establish committees for projects and events.
 - b. Record all meeting agenda items.
 - c. Record and be responsible for the financial transactions of the group.

Meetings

Meetings will be held at Bldg. P-28 on the third Monday of the month at 1900.

Voting

Those members in attendance at the meeting may vote.

Amendments

Procedures may be amended every six months or when deemed necessary by the group.

Phone Tree and E-mail Etiquette

Phone and e-mail trees are a great way for Family Readiness Groups to quickly communicate with members. It is an alternative system to a prerecorded careline. Participation for both must be voluntary.

Ombudsmen cannot share official roster information with the Family Readiness Group. The Privacy Act of 1974 allows ombudsmen access to that information, but it makes no provision for the Family Readiness Group.

Advertise the phone and e-mail tree at command indocs and have the CMDCM/COB give the FRG coordinator's phone number to service members. Advertise both trees at your meetings and deployment briefs, so all spouses know they exist. Ask the ombudsman to advertise them in the newsletter. You may also ask the command to advertise in the ship's newsletter.

Phone and e-mail trees are used to notify group members of upcoming meetings and social events. All messages must be approved by an advisor and have only official contents. Because numbers and e-mail addresses are private, they must not be used for selling or soliciting.

An advisor calls the phone tree committee chairperson to activate the phone tree. The committee chairperson calls each volunteer who is a "phone tree caller." In turn, they call the group members on their list of names.

☐ Phone Tree Etiquette

- Write down the message from the committee leader and read it back for clarification.
- Read the message as it was stated to you.
- Be friendly and brief.
- Do not give out unauthorized ship information.
- Do not repeat or encourage rumors.
- Encourage group members to participate.
- Refer group members to the ombudsman for assistance with problems or resources.
- Leave messages on machines if necessary.
- Call back if a child takes the message for the parent.

☐ E-mail Etiquette

- Typing in caps normally signifies an association with anger or yelling.
- As a courtesy to others on the e-mail list – Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) all email addresses to discourage others who might abuse the e-mail addresses with spam.
- Do not forward jokes.
- Be careful of Replying to All – replying to all includes everyone previously emailed. Reply to only who is intended.
- If you don't feel comfortable writing it on a postcard, don't say it in an e-mail.
- Ask for permission from family members before forwarding emails to them.
- Don't ask the Ombudsman for the Command Roster/E-mail list. That list is strictly for command use.
- Above all – remember OPSEC!



Newsletters

Newsletters may be produced by the ombudsman or the command. To show that the Family Readiness Group is in touch with everyone in the command, take time each month to write a short paragraph to incorporate into the newsletter. Some commands support a Family Readiness Group newsletter, and a committee coordinates production, collects information, and maintains birthday/special occasion lists for command families. Talk with your command to see how you can make newsletters an effective tool for communicating with command families. If you choose to submit your FRG information via the Ombudsman newsletter, only 20% of the content may be devoted to FRG matters.

Items you may want to include:

☐ **Mark Your Calendar.** Dates and times of upcoming events, such as spouse group meetings, board meetings, fund-raising events, and socials.

☐ **Special Acknowledgments.** Welcome new spouses and note farewells to departing spouses. A special section of birthdays/special events is nice for families to see in the newsletter.

☐ **Ship's Quiz.** A quiz to help build awareness of the command's history. List the questions one month and follow up with answers the next.

☐ **Old Salt.** The old salt explains various military terms and acronyms. A good source of information is *Sea Legs*, published by the Navy Wifeline Association.

☐ **Author, Author.** Offer to print short stories and poems that spouses would like to share.

☐ **Chef's Corner.** Highlight a member's favorite recipe for all spouses and families to share.

☐ **Year in Review.** In January run a Year in Review to highlight all the activities of the command and the Family Readiness Group. Incoming families will see the accomplishments of the group, and it may generate interest in your group.

☐ **Command Notes.** Have the command note promotions and other shipboard news.

☐ **Messages from the CO/XO or CMDCM.** Invite the CO/XO or CMDCM to write an article for your newsletter. The same applies to the CO/XO spouses.

☐ **Tip of the Month.** Provide tips on home/auto maintenance, gardening, places to visit or eat, etc.

Tips for Newsletters

RESOURCES FOR YOUR NEWSLETTERS

- Command
- Housing welcome centers
- Child development centers
- Local and military newspapers
- Public library
- Family Deployment Guide
- Internet
- Fleet & Family Support Center

WRITING IS A LEARNED SKILL

Write, rewrite, and then rewrite again. Six to eight drafts are often required before the final version of your story is ready for print.

EFFECTIVE HEADLINES

Use active voice—subject first, then verb. Use present tense even though most events occurred in the past. To show the future, use infinitives (e.g., to award, to eliminate).

READERS ARE IMPATIENT

Get information to your readers before they put your newsletter into the trash can. Keep it short—use familiar words: paragraphs of four to six sentences; stories of five or fewer paragraphs.

PROOFREADING

Proofreading is very difficult. Once you have created the material, you are too familiar with it to see your errors. Always ask someone else to proof your work.

A proofreader should read material one element at a time. Do all the body copy, then the headlines, then all the extra material such as page numbers.

Check for spelling. And just because headlines are big, don't assume they are spelled correctly.

Event Planning

Determine the audience for the event. This helps you target your plans. How will you publicize the event? Why would someone want to come?

EVENT:		DATE:		TIME:	
LOCATION:			PURPOSE:		
PUBLICITY:					
COST OF EVENT:					
Food	\$	Drinks	\$	Facility	\$
Prizes	\$	Music	\$	Entertainment	\$
Child Care	\$	Other	\$	Other	\$
Other	\$	Other	\$	TOTAL COST	\$
FACILITY/LOCATION:					
Room/Hall/Park/Restaurant		1st choice			
		2nd choice			
Space needed to accommodate group					
Equipment needed (chairs/tables/cooking facilities, etc.)					
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:					
Chairperson of the committee					
Committee members					
COMMITTEE MEMBER TASKS:					
Item	Committee member responsible				
Publicity					
Cost					
Facility					

Strategic Planning Guide

Having a plan will provide stability and focus to the Family Readiness Group, Spouse Club, or Association. Use this guide as a tool in developing your annual plan.

TASK	NOTES	
Questions to ask the Commanding Officer or POC:		
Ask for permission if establishing a new group.		
What are the limitations/guidelines for fund-raising, publicity methods, and FRG role in command functions?		
Clarify roles of ombudsman/advisor in relation to the group.		
What are the command's goals or priorities for the group?		
Who will be the FRG's Command Point of Contact?		
GENERAL INFORMATION	DATE	NOTES
Establish your FRG's mission statement.		
Write or review your FRG's bylaws/procedures.		
Decide child care issues.		
Select a meeting day and time.		
Establish publicity methods.		
Establish the structure of the group (formal officers, chairmen, advisors).		
Develop a budget.		
Establish a plan for fund-raising.		
Establish a plan for emergencies.		
Call your FFSC Command Representative.		
ANNUAL CALENDAR (enter dates on a calendar)	NOTES	
Command picnics/parties, sporting events		
Holiday parties (all seasons)		
FRG board meetings, regular meetings, social functions		
Command underway schedule/yard periods		
Scheduled deployment dates		
DEPLOYMENT PLANNING	TARGET DATE	DELEGATED TO
Establish a plan for keeping out-of-town families informed.		
Establish a plan for FRG family activities.		
Children's parties		
Fund-raising		
Membership		
Plans for Halfway Celebration		
Plans for Homecoming		
Single sailor support (optional)		



**FLEET &
FAMILY
SUPPORT
CENTERS**
OF HAMPTON ROADS

Little Creek
462-7563

Newport News
688-NAVY

Norfolk
444-2102

Northwest
421-8770

Oceana
433-2912

Yorktown
887-4606

WEBSITE: www.ffscnorva.navy.mil

FRG0610N